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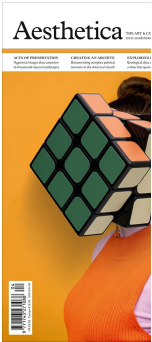




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Portraits Through Time



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John Madu (b. 1983) plays with time. The Nigerian multi-disciplinary artist is best known for his bright figurative paintings: symbolic portraits which look to the past, present and future. Born in Lagos, Madu draws from popular culture, blending modern art, personal experiences and African history. His eye-catching compositions subvert recognisable objects and figures, using domestic spaces as a playground. The resulting images are rich in meaning, deconstructing stereotypes of gender, social class and power. Madu speaks to *Aesthetica* about *A Loop in Time*, his current show at Luxembourg's Zidoun-Bossuyt Gallery.

A: The exhibition at Zidoun-Bossuyt Gallery largely features figurative portraits. Who are your subjects?

JM: The subjects in this exhibition are mostly friends and people I felt inspired by – some of whom I met in almost random instances.

A: What kinds of stories do your paintings tell?

JM: My paintings capture today's world whilst borrowing from the past and from art history. I find everyday life and random instances interesting to record: the resulting paintings are fun yet have social and political nuances. I'm always thinking about the future, and wondering what people will feel when they view my work 50 years from now.



A: Your works are full of symbolism. Can you outline some of the recurring motifs?

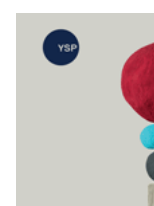
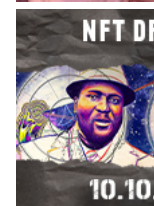
JM: I believe symbols and iconography are powerful: they say a lot with just a little. My work embodies reoccurring personal symbols such as the hurricane lantern, which I used originally to symbolise the lack of constant electricity in my home country. The hurricane lantern represents light. Other motifs include the multicoloured checkered bag termed “Ghana Must Go” in Nigeria; “The Chinatown Tote” in America; and “Tuekenkoffer”, which translates to “The Turkish Suitcase.” This patterned fabric – which appears as bags and suitcases in my work – represents travel or movement. The watermelon is another symbol in my work, representing a new-found freedom.

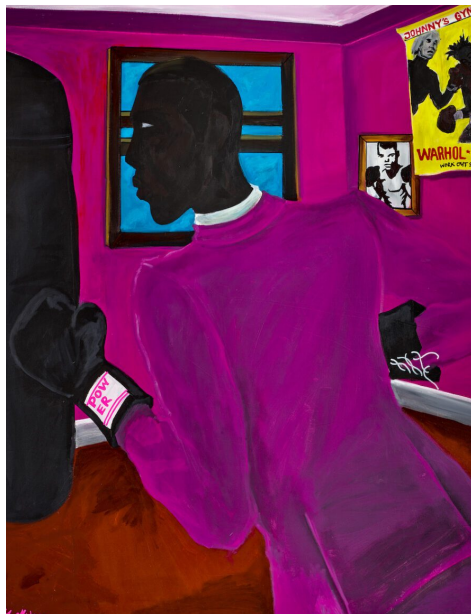
A: What’s the story behind the exhibition’s title, *A Loop In Time*?

JM: *A Loop in Time* is derived from my forays through history and art history. It highlights the importance of using past events to navigate contemporary times. My aim for this show was to borrow from history but change the narratives for the present day – to entertain and educate.

A: The works are instantly recognisable for their bright and bold palettes. How important is colour to your practice, and how do you employ it?

JM: Colours are an important part of my output. I’m interested in how colours complement or juxtapose each other to create certain effects. My use of bold and bright colours stems from an angle of inclusivity: pinks and magenta especially connote this for me.





A: Is there anything you hope audiences take away from the show?

JM: There used to be a stereotype of what art from Africa should look like, or the messages it should pass on. My art speaks about universal issues and relatable situations. Since the world has become a global playing field through technology and travel, my work speaks to an African zeitgeist and highlights new trends from the continent.

A: What's next for you? Any further exhibitions, series or publications on the horizon?

JM: I am preparing a series of new paintings for my gallery Zidoun-Bossuyt, which will open a new space in Dubai in March 2022. We are also working on an institutional project in Europe.

A Loop in Time is at Zidoun-Bossuyt Gallery, Luxembourg, until 24 December. Find out more [here](#).

Image Credits:

1. Installation view, *A Loop in Time* at Zidoun-Bossuyt Gallery.
2. John Madu, *Baby, don't go*, 2021
3. John Madu, *Judgement of Paris (we are the gifts)*, 2021
4. John Madu, *Beach is Good 2*, 2021
5. John Madu, *Training day*, 2021

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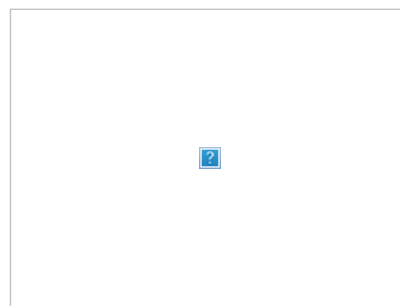
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